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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 003039

SIPDIS

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AF/RA BITTRICK

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PLAN FOR DEPLOYMENT TO BURUNDI

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons 1.5 (b)
and (d).

1 (C) Summary: During a November 23 evening meeting with Ambassador Jeter, Minister of State Lawal Batagarawa reaffirmed that the GON remained committed to deploy troops to Burundi to assist the implementation of the transitional arrangement between the Buyoya government and moderate Hutu politicians. Batagarawa admitted that the work-out brokered by President Mandela was frail, but worth trying. Mandela, according to Batagarawa, had not only arm-twisted Buyoya and the Hutu politicians to work with each other, but also cajoled Obasanjo to deploy troops into what could potentially be harm's way. End Summary.

2. (C) Batagarawa stated that the third Operation Focus Relief (OFR) battalion had been tentatively ear-marked to deploy to Burundi, satisfying Obasanjo's commitment to Mandela. (We have subsequently learned that a non-OFR battalion has now been selected.) The Minister of State believed the Nigerian mission would be tripartite. Pursuant to the Mandela-brokered agreement Buyoya would be the transitional President for 18 months with a Hutu Vice President; after that period, the offices would rotate for an equal duration, with the Hutus gaining the Presidency and the Tutsi taking the second chair. Given the extremist Hutu and Tutsi opposition to the transitional compromise, participating Hutu politicians, many of whom are exiles, required security protection once in Burundi. This protective detail would be the first element of Nigeria's peace mission. The South African's contingent, which was already deployed, was focusing heavily on this aspect of the mission.

3. (C) As part of the transitional agreement, Burundi's army would be reconfigured to achieve equal proportions of Hutu and Tutsi throughout the ranks. Given the Tutsi's numerical inferiority, Batagarawa termed this a "good deal" for the Tutsi. If the Army's composition were to parallel the ethnic distribution in Burundi's general population, the Hutu's would predominate and eventually overrun the Tutsi, he suggested. Thus, the second part of the mission would be restructuring and training the new, ethnically balanced army.

4. (C) Traditional peacekeeping would be the third element of the mission, according to Batagarawa. With the army being drawn to the barracks for the restructuring, there will be a security vacuum throughout the country. As the Nigerian, South African and other troops deploy to different areas of the country, security would devolve to them, he predicted. Acknowledging the upsurge in fighting that followed the November 1 inauguration of the transition, Batagarawa hoped that events on the ground would not force a change from a traditional peacekeeping presence to a more robust peacemaking posture.

5. (C) Given Burundi's difficult political terrain and the nature of the tasks assigned to the force, Batagarawa could not estimate how long the deployment would last. The figure of six months had been bandied about, but the Minister of State dismissed that as diplomatic slight-of-hand, a figure used to dampen opposition to the deployment and to engender confidence by promoting the idea that peace is on the fast track. However, Batagarawa argued, the job of restructuring the army would be impossible to accomplish within that time period.

6. (C) Batagarawa went on to state that the EU and Belgians have promised to help fund the deployment of the African contingents to Burundi. The Dutch had also expressed an interest in supporting Burundi peace deployments, he believed. Batagarawa said that while Nigeria had not asked for any financial assistance to help fund its deployment, he was sure Ghana and Senegal, the other two participating

states, would require and ask for financial and other help before deploying troops.

17. (C) While Batagarawa did not seek funding for this specific mission, he mentioned that Nigeria needed financial relief to continue active participation in multiple peacekeeping operations. Batagarawa raised the idea that donor nations provide Nigeria debt relief in proportion to Nigeria's outlays for peacekeeping. He said that Nigeria, in participating in these far-flung operations, not only helped to stabilize Africa, but was "doing the dirty work" that no Western country wanted to do. While these efforts were in Nigeria's interest as well, he felt the West should give Nigeria credit for its peacekeeping endeavors. By receiving debt relief, the GON could silence critics of Obasanjo's foreign policy by showing that Nigeria's strategic cooperation with the west, particularly the U.S., has produced practical dividends.

Comment

18. (C) According to Batagarawa, the Burundi deployment is imminent. While cognizant of the logistical and other challenges of such a distant deployment in a harsh, unknown environment, the Nigerians seem committed to fulfilling the President's pledge to Mandela. This deployment is not only a manifestation of Obasanjo's personalized diplomacy but, with some prodding by Mandela also of his foreign policy vision of Nigeria as a leading player in advancing continental stability.
Jeter